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ABSTRACT

A female inmate profile was compiled as the first phase of a three-part model for developing an educational and vocational program for female prison inmates. A 67-item questionnaire addressed demographics, education, educational programs, employment, behavior and attitude, and personal relationships; it was administered to the female population at Prince George's County Correctional Center (CCC), in Maryland (outside the District of Columbia). The majority of the study's participants were under age 40; of these, 80 percent were under 35 and one-third were between the ages of 18 and 26; fewer than one-fourth are native Prince Georgians, more than half were born in Washington, D.C.; consistent with national studies, slightly more than half had never been married. Some of the results of the survey were the following: (1) most of the respondents were women of color, 95 percent of whom were African American; (2) more than 50 percent had not graduated from high school; (3) most viewed a high school diploma as very important; (4) fewer than one-fourth viewed college as a goal after completing high school; (5) 50 percent thought having a college degree is very important; and (6) only one inmate had a college degree. Phase II of the proposed model will develop the labor force outlook and institutional and community resources of the proposed model, and Phase III will create a cohesive education and vocational structure. (KC)

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Toward Educating Minority Female Offenders: Institutional Orientations, Academic and Vocational Stereotyping Phase I

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Educating Minority Female Offenders: Institutional Orientations Toward Academic and Vocational Stereotyping

PHASE I

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The educational and vocational needs of female offenders, irrespective of race, receive little attention from the criminal justice system or the field of education. While some might argue that more funds are justly expended on male offenders because most criminal offenders are male, (Mann, 1984) found that minority females are at least as criminally involved as their male counterparts. It is also noted that the arrest rate of minorities is dissimilar to their representation in the general population (Mann, 1984). Nonetheless female offenders are rarely the focal point of empirical studies or government reports on correctional facilities. If female correctional issues are addressed in the literature, the focus is typically one made for the commercial media. The attention is rarely on the educational and vocational needs of incarcerated women.

Although most juvenile and adult female offenders are high school dropouts, an overwhelming majority realize they need more education (Glick and Neto, 1977). However, if a female inmate needs academic or vocational education, she will find stereotypical differences between her options and those of male inmates. This is said to be due primarily to a lack of accredited programs and GED courses, both of which are more readily available for male inmates. Some would blame at least a

portion of the problem on male correctional administrators. Indeed, males manage the majority of female facilities at the state (51%) and local (82%) levels (American Correctional Association, 1990).

In any event, correctional managers and educators agree that public education is the primary vehicle through which most young people, both male and female, learn the rudiments of education while being exposed to the range of career options. Unfortunately yet typically, many female inmates enter and leave jail without having completed their high school education. They are under-educated and often untrained.

This study will lead to the conceptualization of a model for developing an educational and vocational program for female inmatess. The primary components of the model are:

- Female Inmate Profile
- Labor Force Outlook
- Institutional and Community Resources

Figure 1 depicts these components as they are currently being considered. The compilation these components will develop into a cohesive educational/vocational training model. The goal of the current research effort is to develop a Female Inmate Profile.

Figure 1

EDUCATION AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING MODEL FOR FEMALE OFFENDERS

Phase I

FEMALE INMATE PROFILE

* Personal Demographics
* Education
* CCC Programs
* Employment and Skills

Phase II

LABOR FORCE OUTLOOK

* Educational and Employment Opportunities
* Educational Assessment
* Occupational outlook
* Post Secondary Educational Options
* Skills Needed

INSTITUTIONAL AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES

* School System
* Correctional System
* Community
* Human
* Technological

Phase III

FEMALE INMATE PROGRAMS

* Education
* Vocational Training
* Counseling

METHODOLOGY

Members of the County Correctional Center Advisory Committee for Female Offenders developed a 67 item questionnaire, retrospective in focus, that addressed the following areas: Personal Demographics, Education, County Correctional Center Programs, Employment, Behavior and Attitude, and Personal Relationships. The questionnaire was designed to develop a general profile of the facility's female offenders, focusing on their educational and vocational needs. The following are sample items from the Education and Vocational/Technical Training sections:

Education

How satisfied were you with how you were doing in school at the end of your last school term? (select one)

_____ Very satisfied

_____ Somewhat satisfied

_____ Somewhat dissatisfied

_____ Very dissatisfied

Using the scale below, indicate to what extent you are satisfied with the training program at CCC? _____

1= to a great extent

2= to a moderate extent

3= to a slight extent

4= I'm dissatisfied

5= I do not know anything about the educational program at CCC.

RESULTS

The majority of those participating in the study were under the age of 40, of whom 80 percent were under 35 and one third were between the ages of 18 and 26. An overwhelming majority of the respondents are women of color, 95 percent of whom are African American. Fewer than one fourth are native Prince Georgians, however more than half were born in Washington, D.C. Conversely, one fourth reported that they currently reside in the District of Columbia and slightly more than a third currently live in Prince George's County.

Nationally, the average female offender has never been married (American Correctional Association (1989). Similarly, among CCC female inmates, slightly more than half reported that they have never bee married. Among those how have been married, a significant majority (58%) were either separated or divorced at the time of the study. One fourth had no children, however a significant majority (65%) reported that had between one and

three children. Two inmates were pregnant at the time of the study.

More than fifty percent reported that they had not graduated from high school. On the other hand, almost ten percent fewer said they had graduated from high school. This was obviously inconsistent with their earlier response. Indeed, in response to a subsequent question, one fourth reported that they had received a high school diploma. These inconsistencies are explained by CCC officials who report that very often, both male and female inmates have a tendency to embellish their academic achievement, particularly when discussing whether they have graduated from high school.

Therefore, it is consistent that an overwhelming majority (88 %) responded that they highly valued a high school diploma. Similarly, a majority had employment as their post-high school goal in business-related fields. Twenty percent cited marriage as their goal. Only eighteen percent viewed college as a goal after completing high school and although half of those responding thought it very important to have a college degree, only one respondent reported that she had a degree (B.S.) when the questionnaires were administered. She graduated from Inmates University with a degree in Business Administration in 1976.

Almost one half of the respondents listed GED as a program they would like to see available or expanded at the corrections center. GED classes are already offered to all inmates, however when speaking to some female inmates individually, it was learned

that these classes are over subscribed and understaffed. When asked what had been their post-high school goal, an impressive majority (73%) cited a job as their goal. The second most frequently mentioned goal was vocational or business training. Twenty percent cited marriage as a goal. Interestingly, only eighteen percent viewed college as a goal after completing high school.

Respondents were asked how they supported themselves before they were arrested. While a third reported that they were supported by either their husband or boyfriend, an almost equal number said they had worked. Inmates said they were trained to perform a variety of jobs. One third said they were trained for sales positions, one fourth had secretarial training and thirteen percent had training as a beautician. Almost one fourth said they had data entry training.

Related items of note were that an overwhelming majority (65%) reported that they would like to receive some form of computer training. A third expressed an interest in receiving general vocational training, although they did not specify the type of training. On the other hand, a sizeable number of female inmates expressed an interest in having college courses made available while they were incarcerated. Unfortunately, approximately one third of the respondents reported that they knew nothing about the educational programs at CCC.

SUMMARY

- An overwhelming majority of the respondents are women of color, 95% of whom are African American.
- Most respondents were relatively young. Eighty percent were under 35 years of age, of whom a third were between the ages of 18 and 26.
- More than fifty percent reported they had not graduated from high school.
- An overwhelming majority viewed a high school diploma as very important.
- Less than one fourth viewed college as a goal after completing high school.
- Fifty percent thought having a college degree is very important.
- Only one inmate reported that she has a college degree.

Obviously there is a need for educational and vocational model for female offenders, however these components will function best if they are connected and work together. Phase II of the proposed model will develop the Labor Force Outlook, Institutional and Community Resources. The goal of Phase III is a synthesis of Phases I and II, creating a cohesive education and vocational structure. The remaining components and syntheses will be completed in the 1993-94 school year.

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